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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000921

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/25/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EC](#)  
SUBJECT: CAMPAIGN FOR YES VOTE ON CONSTITUTION COMPELLING

REF: A. QUITO 682  
[1](#)B. QUITO 913  
[1](#)C. QUITO 567

Classified By: Charge Andrew Chritton for reason 1.4 (D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Those planning to vote "yes" in the Sunday referendum, led by President Correa and his Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) movement, encompass many social organizations, leftist political parties, and other Ecuadorians that believe the new constitution will promote justice, equality, and a better life for all. Some of those who will vote in favor acknowledge the constitution needs to be improved, but view the principles included in it as advances worth supporting. Correa's travels around the country over the last two months feature a potent mix of public works inaugurations, promises of assistance, and constitution salesmanship. The national government has poured more than \$2 million into television and radio ads, which it says are aimed at making the contents of the new constitution known to the public. ConGen Guayaquil is reporting by septel describing the "no" vote supporters, arguments, and campaign. (End of summary)

TOP TEN ARGUMENTS FOR "YES"

[1](#)2. (C) The most common arguments we have heard in favor of approving the new constitution are:

- It recognizes the Ecuadorian people,s aspirations for change.
- It gives the common people a chance to improve their lives. The Manabi province PAIS coordinator told PolCouns that before Correa only &professionals8 (meaning the wealthy and well-educated) had opportunities in Ecuador.
- It strengthens citizens' rights to health care, social security, and education (notably free university education).
- It improves administration of justice and the electoral system, especially by delinking appointments from political party influence.
- It gives citizens a real voice in government decisions that affect them (through the Social Control and Transparency function and other mechanisms ) Ref A)
- It creates a "plurinational" state and recognizes indigenous justice systems.
- It promises continued government subsidies to the needy.
- It establishes the "rights" of nature and commits to sustainable development (Ref B).

-- It guarantees compliance with the new constitution by creating a powerful Constitutional Court to interpret it so the constitution will not be ignored.

-- It is the only way to broaden the political base and prevent entrenched elites from controlling the country's social and economic systems.

13. (C) Some advocates for the constitution have focused on more radical arguments, such as that the constitution will provide for redistribution of wealth and recover Ecuador's sovereignty by prohibiting foreign military bases. Generally these are lesser themes in the "yes" campaign.

#### PRO-CONSTITUTION "POLITICOS"

14. (SBU) Long before the draft constitution was finalized in late July, Ecuadorian politicians started to line up for or against the new constitution. Obviously the Correa government and his PAIS movement were in the lead in advocating in favor. PAIS Assembly members we spoke to following the Constituent Assembly's closing ceremony July 25 all said they would rest for a few days, then planned to campaign and campaign.

15. (SBU) Other political parties on the "yes" side of the ledger are the far-left Popular Democratic Movement (MPD), the Socialist Party, the indigenous political movement Pachakutik, and individual members of the Democratic Left party. The latter two parties, and indigenous groups more broadly, faced challenges in unifying their positions. Some indigenous leaders unequivocally supported the "yes" vote and the government, such as Pedro de la Cruz of the National Federation of Indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian, and Peasant Organizations. Other indigenous leaders wanted to back the new constitution without necessarily endorsing the Correa government, given their differences over approval for extraction of non-renewable resources and other matters (Ref A). In a statement dated September 4, the most important indigenous organization, the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), announced that it would support the "yes" vote but would continue to be critical of the government. Indigenous Assembly member Monica Chuji, who was Communications Secretary at the start of Correa's term, left PAIS September 17. Meanwhile, the Democratic Left (ID) party, Ecuador's most important in the 1980s, was divided over whether to support the new constitution or the null vote. In the end, ID left its members to vote their own views without a party position.

16. (C) Of the mayors of Ecuador's three largest cities, only Quito's Paco Moncayo has said publicly that he views the provisions in the new constitution as a plus for municipal autonomy, although he called for clarification of the complex provisions on local government funding. (He may hope that his support for the new constitution will persuade PAIS not to run a candidate against him, but this appears unlikely.) The majority of the other 220 mayors also support a "yes" vote. Groups representing 23 of 24 provincial prefects, apparently expecting increased central government funds to their areas, have also expressed their backing for the new constitution.

#### PROFESSIONAL AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS FOR THE "SI" VOTE

17. (SBU) Transportation workers, unlicensed taxi-drivers, and street vendors, seeing the GOE as favoring their efforts to gain recognition and opportunities, all spoke out early in support of the new constitution. National Educators Union teachers, labor union federations, women's groups, gay and lesbian rights supporters, and some student organizations (e.g., the Federation of University Student of Ecuador), among others, are also proponents of the "yes" vote. Groups led by well-known human rights leader Alexis Ponce and President of the Public Servant's Association Miguel Garcia were among those that signed a manifesto called "Quito Says Yes" on August 29.

¶18. (C) Some business leaders support Correa and the new constitution because in their view his government has visibly reduced corruption. For example, Manta port commercial manager Johny Medranda told Guayaquil pol/econoff that before this government, he had to pay regular bribes to Social Christian Party leaders. Under the Correa administration, he has not been approached by any government officials to pay bribes.

¶19. (C) Like the indigenous group CONAIE, some of the other groups who plan to vote "yes" acknowledge that they see defects in the document, but believe they are outweighed by advances overall. For example, AFL/CIO-funded Solidarity Center's representative Patricio Contreras told poloffs September 10 that labor unions generally support the new constitution, but disagree with the restriction on unionization of public sector workers. Academic and PAIS Assembly advisor Rafael Quintero expressed displeasure to PolCouns July 25 when he discovered that the Assembly's review commission had changed "guaranteeing" food security to "promoting" it, discarding the language the committee and plenary had agreed on. A Health Ministry contact told us in August she did not consider the document perfect, but welcomed the commitment to increased health care spending.

#### GOVERNMENT AND PAIS OUT ON THE HUSTLINGS

¶10. (SBU) President Correa has consistently stated that it is his moral obligation to campaign for the yes vote, consistent with the mandate he received from Ecuadorians in 2006. He has made no bones of the fact that he meets with the PAIS leadership to plan the campaign during his near-daily official visits to different cities. During his September 6 radio address, he stated: "It would be immoral for me not to campaign for the yes vote. But I cannot employ public funds, I can only use my voice. So yes and 1,000 yeses to the new constitution!" To support his claim, he cited President Bush's message of support for McCain during the Republican Convention. Correa mixes campaigning for the new constitution with inaugurations of public works and delivery of agricultural goods and subsidies all over the country.

¶11. (SBU) Former PAIS Assembly president Alberto Acosta has campaigned nationwide, extolling the benefits of the new constitution, but on an individual basis, without hiding the fact that he and President Correa have not reconciled their differences (Ref C).

¶12. (SBU) PAIS organized a large national rally (estimated participation 150,000) on August 23 in Quito in favor of the "yes" vote. It is conducting an extensive door-to-door campaign organized through its provincial, cantonal, and neighborhood coordinators. The PAIS campaign uses a comic entitled "The Birth of the New Fatherland," which was reportedly printed by the GOE's National Secretariat of Peoples. The comic shows the opposition as green monsters, with citizens dressed in typical clothing shown beating them. The comics appears to represent two prominent television journalists who have discrepancies with Correa as the "the same old, same old."

¶13. (SBU) Since the campaign period opened August 14, the national government has pumped more than \$2 million into TV and radio ads, according to Infomedia. Its ads focused on constitutional articles on the right to life, heterosexual marriage, adoption by heterosexual couples, right to property, freedom of education, and the financial system (mostly countering criticism from constitutional opponents). In addition, the government prepared a series of 15 programs focusing on different themes included in the draft constitution. Media outlets, initially reluctant, agreed to broadcast the government's programs in accordance with existing legislation, not previously enforced, that guarantees up to one hour per day to the government to broadcast health and education programs.

#### COMMENT

¶14. (C) President Correa and his PAIS movement have outspent and outcampaigned the organizations supporting the "no" vote. They have succeeded in translating the dry constitutional text into issues Ecuadorian citizens care about, like jobs, education, health care, fairness, and justice. Correa's personal charisma and plentiful government handouts make him a potent campaigner. As a result, the only question that remains on Sunday is the margin of approval for the new constitution, not the outcome

CHRITTON